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**Written Testimony submitted to the committee regarding H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

Hello, my name is Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario; I am the CEO of COMPASS Youth Collaborative, a nonprofit that works with high-risk youth in the City of Hartford.

COMPASS works with Hartford's highest-risk youth wherever they are. We engage them in relationships to provide the supports and opportunities they need to become ready, willing, and able to succeed in education, employment, and life.

I want to share a story with you; I want to tell you about Sean. At 12, Sean was shot while walking to the market to get his mother some groceries. While he recovered from the physical wounds of the shooting, the emotional wounds did not go away.

Sean suffered from trauma; **trauma is fear that won't shut off.** Ongoing traumatic experiences stored in the body keep it in a constant state of flight.

Living in that state of flight kept Sean's brain from growing and making healthy pathways; it kept him from making appropriate decisions. Sean made poor choices that caused him to become involved with the juvenile justice system.

That's when our COMPASS Peacebuilders intervened. We advocated for Sean; the judge agreed that Sean could enroll in our program instead of entering the detention center.

It wasn't a straight line for Sean, but our team was relentless; they helped Sean understand his trauma and gave him the tools he needed to succeed.

Unfortunately, Sean's story is not a unique one. What is unique about Sean's story is the change in the trajectory. Sean had a caring adult intervene at a crucial time. Sean could have ended up in prison; instead, he is reconnecting to education, he is working and supporting his family, and he can envision a productive future

**Violence is a public health issue and is as contagious as COVID.** The only difference is that it disproportionately affects men of color, with Black men being murdered at alarming rates. There is no vaccine for violence, but what we can do, is hire more Peacebuilders.

Peacebuilders are young men and women who have transformed their lives and are now helping youth navigate life's obstacles and move towards peaceful, productive lives.

Peacebuilders are in the community, on the streets; they canvass Hartford neighborhoods in times of peace to make meaningful connections. And they are there in times when there is violence, working to de-escalate the violence and heal the community.

The price of saving a youth like Sean is about \$10,000 a year, compared to the cost of incarceration, \$62,000 a year. So my question to you is, is Sean worth \$10,000 a year?

By funding violence prevention programs like COMPASS Youth Collaborative, we can make a difference in our communities.

Today we are asking the Connecticut State Legislature to understand that gun violence is a public health crisis and has to be approached as such. Please, fund violence prevention programs and help

us build a community where our youth feel safe, live peacefully, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

**It's time to treat gun violence as a public health crisis and stop the pandemic.**

Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario

[COMPASS Youth Collaborative®](#)

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